

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Members:

I have served since 1999 as the Executive Director of the Michigan Public Transit Association, the state's oldest and largest organization representing over 60 public transportation providers, of all sizes, across the entire state.

During this time I have been involved in committees of the two national transportation associations as well, so I have some knowledge of how other states and regions configure their public transit operations.

One of the long-standing issues throughout this time, and well before, is the failure of Southeast Michigan to develop a well-rounded, interconnected regional public transit system. Several well-intended studies have found the region's poor regional transit to be a major detriment to economic development expansion in southeast Michigan.

I have observed the many trial balloons and failed efforts to create a true regional system.

From my experience as an observer, both here and of other regional efforts across the country, I must testify today that the one greatest detriment that can be placed in the way of creating a great regional transit system is to allow for local municipalities to opt-out of the service area.

If you allow for opt-outs from a new regional system, here is what you will get: A second transit system that is layered over SMART which has been hampered throughout its existence due to opt-outs. Why would you want to have two systems: a suburban system and a regional system where neither one is allowed to service customers throughout their entire service area?

On the other hand, if you are sincere in wanting to see a strong regional connected transit system that maximizes the areas now served by SMART, DDOT, AAATA and, yes, even the People Mover and the QLine, you will allow that new system the freedom to develop unencumbered by opt-outs. The freedom to construct a true, regional transit system where employers are able to depend on their employees getting to work on time, and where businesses know they can depend on their customers being able to move freely about the region.

Even where “outstaters,” like me, who enjoy the sports and entertainment venues of the Motor City and the region, have the option of being able to drive to a suburban location and utilize public transportation to ride downtown and back, and throughout the region, to spend our dollars at the great venues and not have to face traffic jams and fight for limited parking spaces.

That’s what leads to a robust economic development model and that, in my opinion, is what this debate should be focused upon.

Thank you.